

Health Facts



Be Physically Active

Many older people may feel that physical activity is not safe to do, or that they are too busy or too tired to be physically active. But being physically active every day is one important aspect of a healthy lifestyle that can help you to continue to live independently at home in your community. Strengthening your heart, lungs, and muscles and increasing your flexibility contribute to physical fitness. Being active helps you do every day activities like climbing the stairs, shopping for groceries, and visiting with family and friends.

Research shows that regular physical activity can promote psychological well-being and aid in reducing feelings of mild to moderate depression and anxiety. On a day that you're feeling a bit tired, down, or stressed, consider taking a brisk walk.

Leading a physically active lifestyle can also help maintain a healthy weight and prevent weight gain. Balance the calories you take in as food and beverages with the calories that you use through physical activity.

People with higher levels of physical activity are at lower risk for developing chronic disease. Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of or help manage chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, stroke, coronary artery disease, type 2 diabetes, colon cancer, and osteoporosis. It can also help prevent or reduce falls.

Different intensities and types of activity provide different benefits. Generally, if you are able to talk while performing the physical activity, it's moderately intense. But if you're breathing hard

and it's hard to hold a conversation, the activity is vigorously intense. Vigorously intense activity burns more calories than less vigorous activity in the same amount of time.

For most people, moderately intense physical activities include:

- Walking briskly
- Doing yard work
- Scrubbing the floor
- Actively playing with children
- Pushing a wheelchair
- Biking at a casual pace

For most people, vigorously intense activities include:

- Jogging or running
- Swimming laps
- Playing sports such as basketball or soccer
- Cross-country skiing

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Consult with your healthcare professional if you have certain chronic diseases or are taking specific medications that could affect your participation in physical activities. Your healthcare professional can also help determine the best level of physical activity for you, and whether you should participate in supervised or unsupervised programs.

Explore physical activity programs for older adults offered by local organizations such as senior centers, recreation departments, hospitals, fitness centers, churches, community centers, and schools.

Reduce your risk for chronic disease.

Do at least 30 minutes of moderately-intense physical activity, above usual activity, on most days of the week. You don't need to do it all at once—it's all right to break up your physical activity into three, 10-minute times throughout the day. And, increasing the intensity or the amount of time that you are physically active can have even greater health benefits.

Help manage body weight and prevent weight gain.

You may need at least 60 minutes of moderately to vigorously intense activity, above usual activity, on most days of the week to manage your weight. At the same time, watch the calo-

ries in the food you eat—you can figure out the right number of daily calories for you by looking at the chapters in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, 2005 at www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.

Achieve physical fitness.

This includes cardiovascular conditioning (getting your heart rate up), stretching exercises for flexibility, and resistance exercises or strength training for improving muscle strength and building endurance. Combining these different types of physical activity can help you be faster and stronger. It is important for older adults to include resistance exercises at least two times a week.

WHAT'S STRENGTH TRAINING?

Strength training physical activity includes resistance exercises that can increase muscle strength and maintain the integrity of your bones. Strength training makes your body strong and more toned. Examples include using free weights or weight machines, and resistance bands. They're an important part of getting your heart rate up and it's beneficial to include them 2 or more days per week. Strength training and weight bearing exercise such as walking can help reduce the risk of falls in older adults and may help reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

FITTING IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Finding time to be physically active can be a challenge. It is important to schedule it in and make it part of your routine. Studies show you get the same health benefits from breaking up physical activity into three to six 10-minute or two to four 15-minute intervals throughout the day. As long as you get your heart rate up and keep it up for the whole 10 or 15 minutes, it's your daily total that's important.

HYDRATION

Proper hydration is important when participating in physical activity. To avoid dehydration, be sure to drink plenty of water or other fluid (non-alcoholic) both during and after the activity.

MOTIVATION

There may be times when you need extra motivation. Leveling-off periods are normal and may signal that it's time to get help from others. You can plan activities with a group, find a buddy to exercise with, record your progress, and feel good about small, consistent changes.